

500 Generations of Continuity, Change and Adaptation



500 Generations of Women in Vermont

Mother, wife, sister, and daughter: these different relationships define her role and shape her actions.

Until the recent past, written histories told stories about men and their actions. In this panel, we spotlight the role of women over the 500 generations of history in Vermont and the greater northeast. These short bullets are based on weeks of research to ascertain their accuracy. The Vermont Historical Society Library at the Vermont History Center in Barre, adjacent to the Archaeology Heritage Center, is a great source of writings by 19th and 20th century women such as journals, diaries, cook books, political and social activism, and so much more.

Societies and families depend on their women. They care for children and elders, gather foods, plant crops, tend gardens, make meals, sew, and make clothing and shoes.

Women teach, heal the sick, and perform countless other jobs.

Women make pottery and baskets; they weave textiles and fiber objects central to everyone's lives.

Nineteenth and 20th century ethnographies of North America's Indigenous people inform us about women's roles in Native societies at least in the last few hundred years. Most of these traditional roles likely go back into deep time. Primary sources such as Champlain de Champlain's journals and books written by travelers, such as Peter Kalm, merit research since they often had a keen eye for details about people, their traditions and customs. Colin Calloway's *The Abenaki* is informative as are all of his books. Modern Abenaki women offer a wealth of information about women's roles in their communities. They share stories about their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and ancestors that illuminate traditional life ways.

A woman can do anything when the need arises: explorer, hunter, fisherwoman, builder, farmer, and any other task to help her family and community.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest recorded European explorers included at least one woman. A spindle whorl recovered at L'Anse aux Meadows at the northern tip of Newfoundland would have been used for spinning yarn, typically a woman's task. Here's a great image of 18th century Abenaki women: " 'In 1749, Peter Kalm, a Swedish traveler near St. Jean, Quebec, described three Abenaki women in a canoe holding guns poised for duck hunting. They donned 'funnel shaped caps, trimmed . . . with white glass beads' and 'French women's waists and jackets.' " Marilyn Blackwell, in her *Vermont Women, A Bibliography*, asks some good questions: "Did the acquisition of guns modify traditional gender roles in food gathering and hunting? To what extent did women participate in and benefit from extensive trade networks with Europeans? How did Abenaki women cope with endless war, disease, and family loss?" (Page 50. *Women in Vermont: A Bibliography*.) We have much to learn about women in history and much to share with our students.

Additional resources to learn more:

A constant companion: The 1860 School Diary of a Vermont Farm Girl. Edited and annotated by Lynn A. Bonfield. Vermont History. pp. 43 - 87. Vol. 78, No. 1. Winter/Spring 2010

http://vermonthistory.org/journal/78/VHS780103_43-87.pdf

[Gender and Vermont History: Moving Women from the Sidebars into the Text](#). Marilyn S. Blackwell, pp.46 - 61. Vermont History. Volume 71 (2003) .Vol. 71, Nos. 1 & 2. Winter/Spring 2003

http://vermonthistory.org/journal/71/vt711_204.pdf

[Women in Vermont: A Bibliography](#). Compiled by Marilyn S. Blackwell, pp. 84 -101. Vermont History Marilyn S. Blackwell, vol. 56, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 84-101.

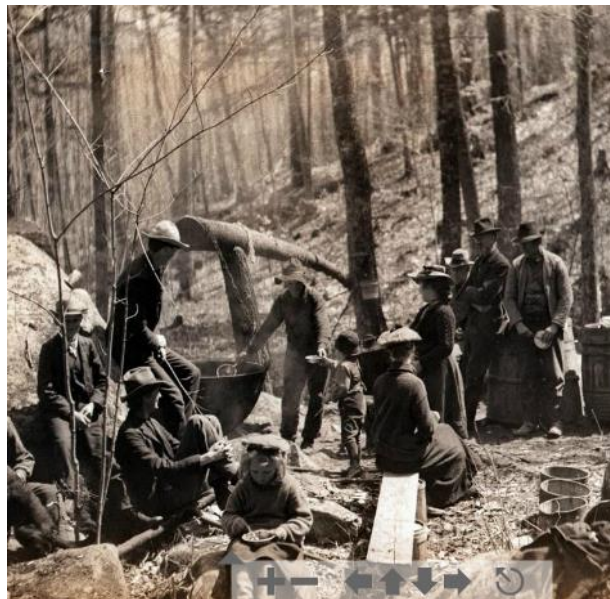
<http://vermonthistory.org/journal/56/VHS5602Women%20in%20Vermont.pdf>

Asticou's Island Domain: Wabanaki Peoples at Mount Desert Island 1500-2000. Acadia National Park Ethnographic Overview & Assessment. Volume 2. Harald E. L. Prins and Bunny McBride. Northeast Region Ethnography Program. National Park Service. Boston, Massachusetts. 2nd Printing, December, 2007

Vol. 2: http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/acad/wabanaki_peoples_vol2.pdf.

Vol.1: http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/acad/wabanaki_peoples_vol1.pdf

The Far Traveler: Voyages of a Viking Woman. Nancy Marie Brown. 2007. Harcourt.



Unknown women at sugaring camp. Ca. 1870 – 1890. From University of Vermont, Landscape Change project.

http://www.uvm.edu/landscape/search/details.php?ls=16953&sequence=000&set_seq=15&imageSet=1403805885-53ac60bd0472f&AddRel=0

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